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ABSTRACT

The Technical Assistance for Special Populations Program of the National Center for Research in Vocational Education (University of Illinois site) undertook a national survey of professionals in vocational education for special needs students to determine how they identify effective programs. Of 500 questionnaires distributed, 366 were returned. Respondents hold a variety of positions in diverse educational settings, most at the secondary level. The primary group of special needs students served were those with disabilities, but also included disadvantaged, dropouts, single and teen parents, limited-English-proficient individuals and immigrants, nontraditional students, displaced homemakers, dislocated workers, and prisoners and offenders. Respondents rank-ordered five elements of outcome-related evidence believed to be most credible in judging program effectiveness. Based on this information, 19 components of exemplary programs were categorized as concerning program administration, curriculum instruction, comprehensive support services, formalized articulation and communication, or occupational experience. These factors will be used in a national search for exemplary programs, and are currently being pilot-tested at six sites. (MSE) (Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse on Literacy Education)

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EXEMPLARY CAREER/VOCATIONAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS FOR SPECIAL POPULATIONS

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Abstract

During 1989, a major responsibility of the Technical Assistance for Special Populations Program (TASPP) of the National Center for Research in Vocational Education, University of Illinois site, is to identify exemplary programs and effective practices for serving youth and adults with special needs through vocational education programs. National Center researchers began this search process during 1988 when they researched policy options and developed a paper that details federal policy options regarding vocational education for special needs populations. That paper focused on access which special needs youth and adults have to vocational education programs and services, quality and effects of those programs and services, and outcomes realized by students and society. As a result of this research, certain criteria of effective programs became apparent. They also noted findings from other researchers such as Eagle, Hoachlander, and Gugerty who cited characteristics of effective programs. In addition to reviewing these research findings on effective programs, the National Center staff surveyed special needs educators to determine the criteria they feel should be used in identifying exemplary programs and effective practices. The programs to be identified during 1989 and subsequent years will thus be a result of extensive research on the criteria that make a program "exemplary."

This program will describe the characteristics of exemplary special needs programs and effective practices in vocational education and will provide information about the programs/practices currently being identified by the TASPP staff. Additionally, persons who feel they have exemplary programs and/or effective practices the National Center may wish to include in their list to be recognized will also find this program of interest. During 1989, TASPP will seek to identify exemplary programs that serve the limited English proficient/immigrant populations, teen parents, and at-risk youth and adults. Information about identified programs will be provided.

A National Survey

For the past two decades, federal vocational education legislation has authorized funding of programs and support services designed to enhance the participation of special population students in secondary and postsecondary vocational education programs. While numerous programming approaches have been attempted, few have been successfully evaluated or examined. Most of the studies of effective vocational education programs serving special population students have focused on one group of students (e.g., the handicapped). Further, the studies have often been descriptive in nature and have seldomly focused on the relationships between program components and the student outcomes achieved by program completers. The results compiled by the National Assessment of Vocational Education (NAVE) (Wirt, et al., 1989) recommend that Local Improvement Grants and Program Demonstration Grants be provided from the basic state grants to communities with higher concentrations of disadvantaged students. Such grants would "expand the base of knowledge about effective practices in vocational education." (Wirt, et al., 1989 p. XVI).

During 1989, one of the responsibilities of the Technical Assistance for Special Populations Program (TASPP) of the National Center for Research in Vocational Education, University of Illinois site, is to identify and disseminate information about exemplary vocational education programs serving special needs students. In order to determine how professionals working in the area of vocational education for special needs students identify effective programs, a national survey was conducted by Dr. Allen Phelps and Thomas R. Wermuth. Of the 500 Surveys distributed throughout the United States, 366 were completed and returned.

The respondents to the survey hold a variety of positions within a diverse set of educational settings. The positions held by the 366 survey respondents are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Positions of Survey Respondents

• Vocational Teacher	96
• Vocational Special Needs Teacher	79
• Other	62
• Local Administrator	56
• Special Education Teacher	28
• University Teacher Educator	23
• State Level Administrator	22

According to the survey findings, most of the respondents work in secondary level educational environments. Table 2 provides information about the work settings of the respondents.

Table 2

Employment Setting of Survey Respondents

• Secondary	245
• Postsecondary	55
• University	34
• State Agency	23
• Adult Education	6
• Other	2

The survey also revealed that the primary students of interest or students served of most of the respondents are students with disabilities. Respondents were free to choose as many of the available categories as possible and were also able to write in groups of students that were not included in the original list. The populations of students of interest or served are described in Table 3.

Table 3

Populations of Interest to Survey Respondents

•	Handicapped/Disabled		196
	Mild	164	
	Moderate/Severe	85	
•	Disadvantaged		173
•	All Special Students		132
•	Dropouts		102
•	Single/Teen Parents		94
•	LEP/Immigrants		76
•	Non-Traditional Enrollees		42
•	Displaced Homemakers		30
•	Other (Blind, Hearing Impaired)		29
•	Dislocated Workers		25
•	Incarcerated/Offenders		24

The final four (4) survey questions focus on determining the information that is most valuable when identifying exemplary vocational education programs serving special needs students and the process that should be used to identify those programs. Respondents were asked to rank order components within the following four (4) categories:

1. Information that is most valuable in describing effective programs and practices
2. Information that is most helpful in judging the effectiveness of vocational special needs programs and practices
3. Student outcome evidence that is most credible in judging the effectiveness of vocational programs serving special needs students
4. Approaches that are most appropriate for identifying effective programs and practices

Respondents were asked to check any appropriate elements they believe are important in describing effective programs and practices. The list presented in Table 4 provides the elements identified by the respondents in descending order.

Table 4

Elements of Effective Programs

1. Educational goals, including anticipated learner outcomes
2. Special population students served
3. Detailed description of the program components or intervention
4. Inter and intra-agency cooperative arrangements/agreements
5. Educational setting or environment
6. Resources used, including staffing, total program cost, and cost per client
7. Duties and qualifications of primary staff

Respondents were also asked to rank the five elements of information they find most helpful in judging the effectiveness of vocational programs serving special needs students. The list detailed in Table 5 presents those elements ranked in descending order of importance.

Table 5

Important Factors Used to Identify Effective Programs

1. Evidence describing the effects of the program upon student attainment of intended outcomes
2. The number and type of special population students enrolling in, and completing the program over the past three years
3. Case studies describing individual students before, during, and following program enrollment
4. Information on the soundness or limitations of the evidence
5. Information from self studies of the program
6. The number and type of special needs students who do not complete the program
7. Information from reports provided by state departments of education
8. Other: "Follow-up data and information"

Respondents also rank ordered the five elements of outcome related evidence they believe are most credible in judging the effectiveness of vocational education programs for special needs students. Table 6 provides a list of those elements ranked in descending order of importance.

Table 6

Important Programmatic Outcome Evidence

1. Acquisition of employability/survival skills
2. Job placement data, training and non-training related jobs taken
3. Enrollment and completion data
4. Labor market experience
5. Independence/dependence of program completers from public assistance
6. Extent to which students pursue further education and training
7. Acquisition of basic academic skills
8. Acquisition of occupationally specific skills
9. Other: "Follow-up data and information"

The final question on the survey asked respondents:

> Which of two general approaches is the most appropriate for identifying effective programs and practices, (1) solicit nominations from knowledgeable leaders (e.g. state directors or stare consultants), or (2) collect and analyze evidence on the implementation and effects of programs and practices?

The second option, collect and analyze evidence on the implementation and effects of programs and practices, was selected significantly more than the first option, solicit nominations from knowledgeable leaders. Unfortunately, most effective program and practice searches throughout the United States appear to utilize a nomination strategy to identify and select exemplary programs serving special needs youth and adults.

Components of Effective Programs

In addition to conducting the national survey regarding exemplary programs, TASPP staff members sought to construct a framework describing the components of exemplary vocational education programs for special needs populations. This framework may prove valuable to state departments of public instruction as they conduct effective program searches, policy makers interested in programmatic issues associated with effective vocational education programs, and researchers interested in studying the effectiveness of various vocational education instructional strategies used with special population learners. During 1989, this framework will provide the structure of components the TASPP staff and TASPP National Task Force will use in identifying effective vocational education programs serving (1) students who are at risk of dropping out, (2) immigrants or limited English proficient (LEP) students, and (3) teen parents.

In order to develop this framework, information from several sources has been collected. These sources include: recent research studies of effective vocational education programs serving special needs learners, criteria and reports from selected state department of public instruction searchers for "best practices" in vocational special needs education, the current literature on effective instruction, current educational legislative provisions, and textbooks designed for courses on vocational education for special population students. When finished, the framework will be used by the TASPP staff and TASPP National Task Force to:

- select and describe programs and their salient components from throughout the U.S. which can be featured as "models" for administrators and practitioners to replicate,
- develop technical assistance resources on selected effective programs and practices,

- strengthen inservice and preservice teacher education preparation with new knowledge, and
- provide a framework to guide further research.

To date, TASPP staff has identified nineteen (19) components of exemplary vocational education programs serving special needs youth and adults. These nineteen (19) components have been categorized into five (5) preordinate clusters, and are detailed in Table 7.

Table 7

Components of Effective Vocational Education Programs
For Special Needs Youth and Adults

Program Administration
1. Strong Administrative Leadership and Support
2. Sufficient Financial Support
3. Formative Program Evaluation
4. Summative Program Evaluation

Curriculum and Instruction
5. Individualized Instruction
6. Integration of Academic and Vocational Curricula
7. Appropriate Instructional Settings
8. Cooperative Learning Experiences

Comprehensive Support Services
9. Assessment of Individual's Vocational Interests and Abilities
10. Instructional Support Services (Aides, Resources)
11. On-going Career Guidance and Counseling

Formalized Articulation and Communication
12. Parental Involvement and Support
13. Notification of Both Students and Parents Regarding Vocational Opportunities
14. Vocational Educators Involvement in Individualized Education Planning
15. Formalized Transition Planning
16. Intra and Interagency Collaboration

Occupational Experience
17. Work Experience Opportunities
18. Job Placement Services
19. Follow-up of Graduates and Non-graduates

The TASPP staff will use the clusters of components listed in Table 7 as a framework to guide their search for exemplary vocational education programs serving special needs youth and adults. The TASPP application process used to identify exemplary programs throughout the United States will focus on obtaining detailed descriptions of the previously stated components from applicants. Once a detailed description of the nineteen (19) components has been obtained, the application will be reviewed by a panel of at least three members of the TASPP National Task Force, and the programs receiving the highest review ratings will be included in an annual publication that will be developed by TASPP and disseminated through the National Center's clearinghouse.

Each program identified as "exemplary," will agree to be listed in the publication as a contact point for individuals wishing to replicate all or part of the program in another location. The goal is to provide an extensive network of qualified individuals willing to help develop and implement effective vocational education practices for special needs youth and adults throughout the United States. The publication and application process will be updated annually, representing the most current research on exemplary programs and practices in vocational education.

Current Exemplary Programs

Currently, the TASPP exemplary program application and guidelines process is being pilot tested at six (6) sites throughout the United States. These sites represent a cross section of educational programs at both the secondary and postsecondary level, providing educational services to a wide range of special needs populations. The first publication describing exemplary

programs and listing appropriate contact persons should be published and ready for dissemination during the 1990 calender year.

Individuals interested in obtaining information from the TASPP staff concerning the search for exemplary programs may contact the authors at:

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